

## ORTHOGONAL COOKING by James Banks

I used to eat a lot of omelets, almost every night. Two eggs slowly fried with cheese added (cheddar, jack, maybe others). One night was fateful:

Tonight I tried grabbing a random spice off the shelf and seeing what would happen if I put it on my omelet. I chose nutmeg.

It didn't taste bad. It didn't taste good, either. It tasted like eggs and cheese with nutmeg on it.

I thought, "I'm going to forget this flavor combination. It's not bad, but it's not memorable." And then I thought. "This is what I want, flavors that aren't memorable. Why live in the tyranny of what's impressive?" So I thought to make this note.

I could call this kind of cooking something like "orthogonal cooking". Trying to find the flavors that (for me) are orthogonal to good tasting or bad tasting food.

And then I tried other combinations:

Update, May 2017

It turns out spearmint (dried, crushed) is good on omelets. Mustard powder is also good. // Water potatoes have been boiled in mixed with milk is orthogonal to some extent, but more bad. // Cinnamon, in sufficient quantities, is good on omelets, but also kind of orthogonal.

For the vegans, I'm going to try oatmeal with various ingredients and see which ones come up orthogonal.

Recipe:

Rolled oats

Water

a moderate amount of salt

[ingredient], enough to be tasted along with oats/water/salt

All ingredients boiled at the same time until oats are basically done

For the sake of not wasting ingredients, I'll report non-orthogonal results, as above.

Thyme: good // Ground ginger: orthogonal // diced cucumber: between orthogonal and bad // ground sage: orthogonal (see below) // ground marjoram: orthogonal (hard to taste, though) // ground nutmeg: good // ground cinnamon: good, but somewhat orthogonal // crushed dried spearmint: good // mustard seeds: ? (boiling the seeds seems to have attenuated their flavor to where I couldn't tell) // onion powder: good

Juxtaposed orthogonal:

Ground sage mixed with oatmeal is different, strangely different. It tastes as though the two flavors (oats and sage) have nothing to do with each other, as though they do not mix in my mouth, or as though they don't share the same universe, although my one mouth connects to both of them, or my one consciousness can contain two universes. (I hope others can replicate this effect. Unfortunately I don't know what sage to oatmeal ratio makes sense for replication, nor exactly what kind of sage.)

I'm not sure if this is orthogonality taken to an extreme, or a separate phenomenon which is "fellow traveler" to it (I'm suspecting it's 80% the latter and 20% the former).

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